

Durable persuasion by demonstrably beneficial policymaking: How selective pro-immigration reforms can generate public support for all migration

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Abstract

Research shows that voters accept more open immigration policies when they believe these policies are beneficial to their country. At the same time, voters tend to underestimate the positive effects of existing immigration policies. Although various attempts to improve immigration attitudes by correcting these misperceptions have generally not been successful, this paper explores the alternative possibility of long-term persuasion by responsible policymaking in line with voters' conditional preference for demonstrably beneficial immigration. Using a new dataset linking the best available public opinion and policy data over the last 40 years across OECD countries, this presentation will show that voter perceptions of immigration's economic benefits are systematically related to the objective reality, including the past skill selectivity of immigration policies and the shares of high-skilled immigrants. The presentation will then show that selective pro-immigration policy changes are associated with greater public support for open immigration in general (including humanitarian immigration). Finally, this dynamic will be illustrated qualitatively by comparing the historical evolution of immigration policy selectivity, politics, and public opinion in Canada and Sweden. Overall, the evidence suggests that, while providing accurate information or reducing prejudice in the electorate is essential, only selective pro-immigration reforms can secure and sustain public support for consistently high immigration rates.

Biography

Alexander Kustov is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His research focuses on public and policy responses to immigration and ethnic diversity in high-income countries. Alexander's work has been published in, among many others, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Journal of Politics*, and *World Politics*. It has been recognized by leading grants and awards, including from the American Political Science Association and the Russell Sage Foundation. He has also written for and been featured in popular outlets such as the *Washington Post* and think tanks such as the Center for Global Development. Prior to his appointment at UNC Charlotte, Alexander was a Postdoctoral Associate in the Jackson School of Global Affairs at Yale University. He received his joint Ph.D. in Politics and Social Policy from Princeton University.